

## **Toward technology-mediated transcultural education: Learning from a discussion of politics and culture between American and Moroccan students**

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**Keywords:** Cultural pluralism | Teachers | Conversation | Cross-cultural studies | Students

### **Article:**

**\*\*\*Note: Full text of article below**

## **TOWARD TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED TRANSCULTURAL EDUCATION: LEARNING FROM A DISCUSSION OF POLITICS AND CULTURE BETWEEN AMERICAN AND MOROCCAN STUDENTS**

Wayne Journell, Mark Dressman, Adam Babcock, Nathan Weatherup,  
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### **Abstract**

This study makes an argument for using synchronous technology as a way to mediate transcultural dialogue in pre-service and K-12 social studies classrooms. As evidence for this claim, the authors present findings from a two-hour videoconference between American pre-service teachers and Moroccan undergraduates that used Skype™ technology as a way for the students to discuss issues relating to culture and politics in a face-to-face setting. In only a matter of hours, a certain level of tolerance for the other's culture and political ideology appeared to manifest itself in both the American and Moroccan students. These findings are then discussed within the greater context of global social studies education.

This study seeks to contribute to the "new wave" of social studies education by making a case that technology, specifically modes of synchronous communication, has the potential to significantly improve students' transcultural awareness and understanding in hopes of creating the type of cosmopolitan citizens advocated by Martha C. Nussbaum and others.<sup>1</sup> Technology is often credited with "making the world smaller" and contributing to increased globalization, but few social studies educators in the United States have taken advantage of these increasingly available and affordable resources or used them in a way that allows students to interact with cultures with whom they may be unfamiliar and, in some cases, misinformed. In this study, the authors endeavored to bring together students from the United States and Morocco who came to the project with preconceived notions of the other. Through a dialogue that touched on language, culture, and politics, a certain level of tolerance and understanding grew among students on both sides of the Atlantic to

the point that, by the end of the conversation, both groups seemed to recognize that the other side was not as unreasonable as they originally thought.

### Review of Related Literature

Even though Walter C. Parker terms international education the new wave of social studies education, he acknowledges that global education itself is not new.<sup>2</sup> For much of the latter part of the twentieth century, educators and pundits have been advocating a globalized approach to education, often to no avail.<sup>3</sup> What, then, has changed within public education, and specifically within social studies education, to convince educators that global education finally has the potential to make a meaningful impact on student learning in the United States? The answers can be found in changing student demographics, international political developments, and increased technological advancements.

Classrooms in the United States look exceedingly different than they did fifty years ago. Increased immigration and internal migration have led to classrooms that often encompass multiple languages, cultures, and religions, yet current social studies curricula too often resemble textbooks found in the segregated classrooms of the early twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> The result is social studies teachers preaching the same civic message of "love one's country" to students who may culturally or politically identify themselves with a nation other than the United States.<sup>5</sup> Over a decade ago, Nussbaum addressed this shift in demographics and asked the famous question of "patriotism or cosmopolitanism?" in education.<sup>6</sup> Although the answer does not have to be as polarized as Nussbaum asserts, social studies educators have a responsibility to equip their students with the skills and dispositions necessary to enter an increasingly pluralistic society, one that will require greater understanding and tolerance of unfamiliar cultures.<sup>7</sup> As Audrey Osler and Hugh Starkey note, "Cosmopolitan citizenship does not mean asking individuals to reject their national citizenship or to accord it a lower status. Education for cosmopolitan citizenship is about enabling learners to make connections between their immediate contexts and the national and global contexts."<sup>8</sup>

For educators in the United States, the need to make students globally aware has never been more important. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were a painful reminder that Americans cannot afford to be blissfully ignorant of international issues and non-

western cultures. Although the devastation may not have led to the sweeping changes to daily life predicted in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, American society in the decade since, one that has been characterized by two foreign wars, increased security, and partisan disagreements on how best to deal with the Arab world, certainly seems to require education that extends beyond national borders.<sup>9</sup>

This increased political focus on non-western culture coincides with a technological age that allows individuals greater access to international news, people, and cultures than ever before. No longer is a student's education confined to teachers, textbooks, or even classrooms. Modern students are becoming literate in multiple forms of media, although the educational implications of many of these media have yet to be explored.<sup>10</sup> What is clear, however, is that the Internet and cellular technology have made access to information ubiquitous, and students are increasingly using email, chatrooms, blogs, texts, instant messages, and social networking sites to interact with others of likeminded interests, many of whom are from nations other than the United States.<sup>11</sup> Given this type of informal globalization in which many students are already engaged, it seems clear that social studies classes are lagging behind in terms of meeting students' civic needs and catering to their intrinsic interests.

### *Educational Benefits of Transcultural Exposure*

Since global education has not received the same level of focus in the United States as it has in other nations, there is limited data on the effects of exposing American students to diverse cultures.<sup>12</sup> Literature on citizenship education in Europe and Canada suggest that global approaches to education provide students with a more nuanced conception of citizenship, particularly in nations that have considerable ethnic and cultural diversity.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the fields of multicultural education and political science provide a strong theoretical argument for the benefits of transcultural education within an American context. James A. Banks makes the case for global interconnectedness as a form of literacy that goes beyond the basic definitions of being able to read and write.<sup>14</sup> As he states,

The world's greatest problems do not result from people being unable to read and write. They result from people in the world—from different cultures, races, religions, and nations—being unable to get along and to work together to solve the

world's intractable problems such as global warming, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, poverty, racism, sexism, and war.<sup>15</sup>

In order to become transculturally literate, individuals must recognize that there are often multiple viewpoints from which to consider cultural and political issues and become receptive to differing views, provided they do not violate individuals' right to civic equality.<sup>16</sup> Research from both political science and education suggests that civil dialogue among individuals with heterogeneous beliefs raises levels of tolerance for divergent beliefs and opinions.<sup>17</sup> When taken in a global context, dialogue has the potential to temper the effects of what Sigal R. Ben Porath calls "belligerent citizenship" or nationalism fueled by racism and xenophobia, an example of which could be seen in the attitudes of many Americans toward Muslims and individuals of Arab descent following the attacks of September 11th.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, engaging in transcultural dialogue is not as simple as merging different cultures together and forcing them to converse. American students, in particular, have to learn to think from a decolonized perspective and avoid the paternalistic attitudes that still permeate throughout western culture, religion, and education.<sup>19</sup> What is encouraging, however, is that research shows many students are already beginning to view the world through a global lens due to increased exposure to global media and that they enjoy discussions of controversial and political issues as part of their social studies curricula.<sup>20</sup>

### *Globalism in Pre-service Teacher Education*

Why, then, is globalism absent in so many social studies classes throughout the United States? In her research on both practicing and pre-service social studies teachers, Merry M. Merryfield has found that teachers themselves may be the most significant barrier to widespread global education. She has found that those teachers who make deliberate efforts to include global elements into their instruction typically have extensive personal experience interacting with individuals of different nations or cultures, giving them the depth of understanding necessary to provide their students with the cross-cultural experiential learning utilized by exemplary global educators. Teachers who do not have these experiences, which constitutes the majority of social studies educators in the United States, tend to shy away from using international resources in their instruction, either out of ignorance or convenience, or a fear of disrupting community norms.<sup>21</sup>

Given Merryfield's findings, it seems essential that pre-service teachers be given opportunities to interact with diverse cultures. Certainly, gaining access to citizens from other nations can be an impediment to transcultural education, but technology can considerably lessen that problem. Recent research has chronicled the use of various technologies, such as email, blogs, threaded discussion boards, and internet chatrooms, as a way to interact with other cultures and develop global identities.<sup>22</sup> The problem with these forms of communication is that they do not allow participants to "see" each other and, therefore, can come across as rigid and impersonal. This project attempted to minimize this barrier by using Skype™ technology to conduct a videoconference between American and Moroccan undergraduate students that would allow participants to be able to discuss cultural and political issues face-to-face in hopes of creating a lasting and transformative experience for both groups of students. Specifically, the effort sought answers to questions of how do Moroccan and American university students understand each others' cultures and politics with respect to media images, globalization, race, and ethnicity, and what factors could be identified as promoting or inhibiting dialogue about these topics.

### Method

In 2008, a team of experienced and pre-service teachers traveled to Morocco as part of a grant aimed at encouraging undergraduate participation in research. One teacher was typical of the global educators described by Merryfield in that he had spent a significant amount of time in Morocco as a member of the Peace Corps prior to entering academia and, therefore, was familiar with Moroccan education and culture.<sup>23</sup> The Moroccan university that participated in this study is located in an historic urban center in the northern part of the country. The highlight of the week-long visit was a two hour live videoconference between a group of fifty Moroccan undergraduate and graduate students and twenty-four American pre-service teachers, most of whom were undergraduates from a large Midwestern research university.

The American students were predominately white, with the exception of one student who was a Bosnian refugee and a practicing Muslim. Of the twenty-six students, nine were male and seventeen were female. Few of the students had extensive experiences abroad, and none of the students had ever visited Morocco or any other Arab

nation. The course in which these students were enrolled is a required course that students take in the semester prior to student teaching that combines instructional methods with a focus on diversity.

Using Skype™ as a platform and a high-quality webcam, Ethernet connection, and LCD projector on each end, some of the study's authors created a communications context in which it seemed as though the two classes were talking to each other through a large window. The discussion was proctored on the Moroccan side by another of the group's authors, the two undergraduate research assistants, and a Moroccan professor of English. A graduate research assistant proctored from the American side. Despite a few initial dropped calls and some audio distortion on the Moroccan side, the technological aspects of the conversation were smooth, and the group eventually achieved remarkable degree of communicative transparency.

The participants had not communicated with each other prior to the videoconference. In preparation for the conference, students on both sides of the Atlantic had been asked to read two short stories from the Moroccan author Leila Abouzeid and the last chapter from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* to serve as a common starting point for discussion.<sup>24</sup> In addition, all participants completed open-ended written questionnaires before and after the conference, in which they were asked to relate what their knowledge and attitudes of each other's cultures were before the conference, and, afterwards, to tell what they had learned and how their perspectives had changed or remained the same as a result of the conference.

The conference was videotaped on the American side and audio-taped on the Moroccan side, providing a full transcript with some short omissions due to technical difficulties. In addition, the American investigators completed field notes of their experience before, during, and after the conference, and all participants were debriefed by their in-person investigators immediately after the conference. The analysis of the audio and video recordings and transcripts, field notes, and participant questionnaires followed standard protocols for ethnographic and qualitative research and discourse analysis.<sup>25</sup> Finally, during an exchange visit to the United States by the Moroccan professor who participated in the study, the American authors conducted member checks of their interpretations of the conversational exchanges.

## Findings

The study group strongly suspected, based on its prior interactions with students in both countries, that the Moroccan and American students would approach the videoconference with very different sets of expectations and attitudes, and the pre-conference surveys supported that assumption. Students in both countries used strong language to characterize each others' cultures and politics; their selection of terms reflected a certain amount of stereotyping on both parts, and, in some cases, gender differences. For example, when the American students were describing the Middle East, they offered up such words as *mysterious, anxious, dangerous, religious, extreme, oil, desert, conservative, hot, Third World, occupied, war-torn, and isolationist*. These students' characterization of Middle Eastern politics showed some gender differentiation, with women using more emotionally oriented descriptors such as *turmoil, troubled, unsettled, hostile, warfighting, terrorism, divisive, backward, religious-driven, strict, harsh laws, discriminatory, and becoming Americanized*, whereas men used more politically oriented terms such as *theocratic, rocky, misunderstood, radical, victims of neo-liberal imperialism, isolationist, evolving, and interrupted*.

Similarly, when the Moroccan students described the United States, their responses were also emotionally charged, but they tended to be more ambivalent, and differed somewhat by gender. Women used words such as *individuality, rich, civilized, open, white, materialistic, offensive, amazing, ambiguous, large, and poor in history*, while the men used words such as *freedom, order, power, difference, discrimination, world controller, land of opportunities, racist, democratic, and undemocratic*. In general, it seemed that both groups of students were wary of each other, but the geopolitical positions of each group caused them to approach the conference differently.

The conference began very stiffly and formally, somewhat by design. The topic of "development," a prominent theme in Leila Abouzeid's work, provided a relatively "safe" way to begin, and all of the students attempted to compare and contrast the meaning of development within Moroccan and American contexts and to prepare questions to ask each other. However, the kind of dialogue envisioned was not achieved, at least initially. The hope was to initiate a type of discussion that would be best characterized as a seminar in which the students from each country would take turns asking and answering each other's questions without necessarily coming to a consensus of opinions.<sup>26</sup>



Instead, the result was a very disjointed, and often one-sided, “conversation” in which the American students tried to respond through impromptu speeches to lengthy statements made by Moroccan students that often contained multiple points. Sensing that the problem was a lack of “questions,” the American moderators on the Moroccan side of the Atlantic tried to redirect the discussion by asking the American students questions, such as when one author asked:

I have a question for my class. How many of you talked about social and cultural progress more than material or economic progress? [Most students raised their hands.] Now I have a question for the Moroccan students: How many of you talked about economic development, and how many talked about social development, like women’s rights and working with the poor? [Most signaled economic progress.] So do we have two different notions of progress here?

Yet students on either side of the Atlantic largely did not take up these questions, and the conversation continued as a series of monologic exchanges throughout the first forty-five minutes of the conference.

Gradually, however, as the group became more active the discussion, rephrasing statements and raising questions, and as the topics turned from the predetermined texts to issues of interest to the students, such as culture, politics, and media, the students began to respond to each other directly, and often in great earnestness. The first such exchange focused on the topic of language and the importance given in each culture to being literate in multiple languages. This incident, which occurred approximately one hour into the videoconference, was the first instance in which the students directly responded to each others’ remarks in a way that was spontaneous and not premeditated. It marked a turning point in which the students began to rephrase their remarks more interrogatively, but not always without some additional intervention on the part of the moderators.

For example, after a ten-minute break to prepare questions for each other about the Malcolm X reading, one moderator reopened the conversation by asking if the Moroccan students had any questions for the Americans. The following exchange occurred:

*Moroccan Male:*

*You need to learn about Islam before making a judgment. There is a false concept about Islamic society. You say that it promotes terrorism, and you need to learn more before you make that judgment*

- Moderator:* Okay, we need a question. Do you have a question?
- Moroccan Male:* My question is, in general, how do you feel, what is your opinion [of his previous statement]?
- American Male:* First of all, to respond to the first person, I think that what you just made was a generalization about us. We supposedly generalize that you're terrorists, but that's not the case at all. Most Americans are smart enough to know that you're not terrorists. So, I for one, don't know how to view Islam because we get it through the media, we get false pictures of you, so I don't know much about Islam and I'll just be honest and say that.
- American Female:* It's really hard to make a statement about something when you don't know about it and maybe that is a problem for me. I need to study more about the Islamic religion. It's a religion for me, just like some people are Christian or some people are Buddhist.
- American Female:* I agree. I think there is a large problem in the U.S., and we have misconceptions. A lot of people in the U.S. are like this class. We're smart enough to go out and get our own information and form our own opinions, but at the same time, a lot of people just go with what the media gives us, and it's biased.
- American Female:* I'm taking a class about the history of the Middle East, and I think that Islam gives women a great role in the mosque and I think that's more liberating than a lot of

*other religions that don't give women the same roles.*

Another factor that contributed to the developing dialogue was the presence of one Muslim student, Mohamed, among the American students.<sup>27</sup> The moderator called on Mohamed to give his views on how Americans, in general, viewed Islam:

*Moderator: Mohamed? Mohamed, can we get your point of view? Mohamed is the one Muslim in our class. I'm sorry if we're embarrassing you, but I thought you might have something to say.*

*Mohamed: It's true that not everyone in the U.S. thinks all Muslims are terrorists, but I can understand how Muslims outside the U.S. might feel that way. But if you live here and you interact with people here you know that's not the case. I hope that brings some comfort to some people. I think there is hope.*

*Moderator: Let me ask you this. I once got in trouble here [in Morocco] in a presentation because I said I thought it was difficult to be a Muslim in the U.S. I didn't mean Islam was difficult, but I meant that practicing Islam is difficult because schedules are arranged to accommodate Christians, not other religions. So, is it sometimes a challenge to practice Islam in the U.S., Mohamed?*

*Mohamed: No one is denying me the right to practice my religion, and I've heard of schools accommodating students for Ramadan and if they need to do their prayers in a quiet area, and I'm sure Muslims appreciate that. But it's difficult because I*

*don't feel like I'm really practicing my religion as much as I would in a majority Muslim country, but if I really wanted to, I could.*

For the Moroccan students, Mohamed's comments and presence on the American side of the discussion seemed to provide some credibility to the arguments of the American students. The students also began to phrase more frequently their remarks in question form, as in this exchange:

*Moroccan Male: I have two questions. I have one for Mohamed. I know that to be a Muslim in a Christian country is very tough. In Europe they publish cartoons about The Prophet, peace be upon Him, and when they talk about the Holocaust, they say there is no freedom of speech about this. I want to know why this is. We don't have anything against you. And the other question is, why did you choose Bush as the president?*

[Students on both sides of the Atlantic applaud]

*American Moderator: Can the American students raise their hands if you did or would have voted for Bush. [Waits] We have one, two, three? Okay, so we have the question, why did you vote for Bush? It's difficult to explain American politics. It's a two-party system, you have Republicans on one side and Democrats on the other side, and there's no middle ground. So, you can either pick liberal or you have to pick conservative, and so, the question is, why Bush? The better question is, why didn't the Democrats do a better job of finding someone better to run against him?*

*Moroccan Male:* *Why do you have a negative image of Islam?*

*American Moderator:* *Did you understand the question? The question is, why do Americans have a negative impression of Islam? Now, you don't mean them, right? They don't mean you personally, but why does the U.S. have a more negative impression of Islam generally? And do you think that is true, first of all.*

*American Female:* *I think sometimes the media portrays people or a group of people in a negative light in that one person or a group of people have a negative image and it seems like that is the consensus for the whole country, but that is definitely not true.*

*Moderator:* *So you think it's the media who are pushing a negative image and not people in the U.S.?*

*American Female:* *I really do. The media picks and chooses what they want to show on television or the Internet and a lot of time it's the negative images because honestly that's what people want. They like to see scandals on TV and things of that nature, and it's what sells newspapers and it's what sells TV shows. The media leaves out positive things.*

*Moderator:* *[To Moroccan students.] Did you hear that? They think the media do it to sell things. Telling wild and crazy stories sells more newspapers and gets more of an audience on television than stories that tell about people in their daily lives.*

*American Female:* I think what's important is that what's portrayed in the media are extreme behaviors. You don't see everyday experiences of Islam, and so if you don't have a Muslim student in your class, you only see the extreme cases of it and that's where the stereotypes come in.

*American Female:* I think it's a case of ignorance, the population [of Muslims] here isn't large enough that we're forced to deal with . . . all I know of Islam is what I see on the news.

*Moroccan Male:* The media after 9/11 tried to make a terrorist out of every Muslim. How can we teach students and the culture to be more critical of the media?

One last, and perhaps the most intense, example of exchange occurred when a student on the American side asked about the Moroccan students' perception of the veracity of their media:

*American Female:* We've been talking a lot about how our culture perceives Islam and the Middle East. What about how your media portrays the West and the U.S.?

*Moderator:* The question is, do you think your media gives you a clear picture of what the West and the U.S. are like? Does Al Jazeera give you a clear picture of what the U.S. is like?

*Moroccan Female:* Yes.

*First Author:* You think?

*Moroccan Male:* We cannot speak of objectivity in the media. There is always subjectivity. So Al

*Jazeera claims to be objective, but when its interests go against other interests, it goes against American and Western interests, although there is a tension between Europe and America. So, I know from the American point of view Al Jazeera is not objective, although it claims it tries to be as objective as possible. But when you compare between Al Jazeera and CNN, you see how they focus [on different things]. For example, they accuse Al Jazeera of showing pictures of casualties, dismembered people, and civilians killed by Americans. When you try to be so objective you fall into subjectivity.*

*Moroccan Male:*

*When people see pictures broadcast on Al Jazeera, CNN, or NBC, they don't ask questions and that is a problem. We are victims of politicians. You watch the cartoons of the Prophet, you watch the insulting images in Abu Ghraib, you watch pictures of people dying in Palestine, and I am sure that all of you are against these pictures. I'm not saying you are for those crimes, but the problem is, how can we render these problems solved? What can you do to solve these problems?*

*Moderator:*

*Did you hear that? What can be done about religious conflict?*

*American Male:*

*I think the Internet is an important factor there because it can promote alternate news sources [unintelligible].*

*American Female:*

*I think one solution that we need to work on is to learn more about religions because I never learned about Islam in*

*school. Education, mostly. I think that as we get older we become more critical and look for alternate news programs on television. But I don't know if there is a solution.*

By this time, the videoconference had run over two hours and the moderators began to wind down the conversation. The students closed the conference by discussing differences in the life of university students in the United States and Morocco, an exchange that was considerably less contested than the aforementioned examples.

In evaluating students' post-conference comments about each other's cultures, one key finding was that students on both sides were moved by the experience and frankly amazed that through relatively common technology they were able to actually talk with each other in real time about so many important issues. Many students on both the Moroccan and American sides remarked afterwards that they now understood each other's points of view better and had a more nuanced view of people in the other country than before. Generally, the Moroccan students' comments indicated that their learning was divergent—that is, they understood that American opinions about the war in Iraq and other issues in the Middle East, as well as Islam, were far more diverse and less extreme than they had thought. The Moroccan students were surprised that there was less support in the United States for George W. Bush's policies than they had presumed, and that the American students were aware of the power and bias of the American media, as well as how powerful technology could be as a tool of communication. Finally, several students noted that they needed more experience talking with native speakers of English in order to communicate with them fully.

By contrast, the American students' learning was largely convergent in that, as a group, they came to realize how little they actually knew or understood about the Islamic world and how that lack of understanding mattered to the Moroccan students. They also believed that they had made some first steps in understanding the worldviews of the Moroccan students and were challenged to learn more. More specifically, the American students learned how vigorously religious belief is taken and how passionate the Moroccans were in asserting that belief. They were also challenged to change their attitudes about Muslim women, particularly since the students who wore the hajeb, or



scarf, were often the most vocal in their comments. The American students also realized how powerful and biased media images could be and the importance of the United States on world opinion. Finally, many expressed surprise at their relative lack of understanding of world affairs and linguistic abilities compared to their Moroccan peers.

### Discussion

What, then, did the group learn from this exploratory dialogue between Moroccan and American students, and how might these lessons contribute to more effective transcultural experiences within social studies education? First, it is important to note that a limitation of this study is that the videoconference was an isolated event which precludes sweeping generalizations. Its conclusions would certainly be stronger had the authors been able to involve the students in a series of videoconferences or if the authors had supported their initial videoconference with subsequent asynchronous communication that would have allowed students to continue the conversation. In addition, the presence of Mohamed, the American student who was Muslim, seemed to affect the nature of the conversation, which raises the question of whether having Moroccan moderators on the American side of the conversation would have made the discussion even richer. However, this study is about possibility, not typicality. This experience, while limited, offers lessons for global education and explores the potential of using technology as a way to mediate transcultural exchanges among students.

For American pre-service teachers, in particular, the conference seemed to be an eye-opening experience. Based upon their comments during the exchange, the majority of the American students entered the conference holding politically liberal beliefs and probably would have cited global education as important to their conception of education. Yet their comments during the conference, and their general surprise at the Moroccans' attitudes toward the United States, suggests that most of them did not possess sufficient knowledge or life experiences that would have prepared them to be exemplary global educators.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, without experiential experiences like the one in this study, most of these American students would not have had the means to gain similar types of transcultural exposure, at least not before they began teaching, leaving them prone to the unintentional paternalistic

attitudes that Americans often hold based on this nation's sociopolitical history and global economic status.<sup>29</sup>

How, then, are we to expect social studies educators to teach effectively from a global perspective if they do not have adequate knowledge or experiences from which to extrapolate? The same question can be transferred to the students in K-12 classrooms. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why global education has stalled in efforts to reform social studies curricula: one cannot sufficiently teach about globalism and diverse cultures the same way one might teach content; and one has to experience globalism in order to truly understand it. Given their often paternalistic and sometimes derogatory answers on pre-conference surveys, learning about the five tenets of Islam and African geography in high school social studies courses did not seem to help the American students in this study initially to relate to their Moroccan peers. Yet within a mere two hours of face-to-face dialogue, both the American and Moroccan students seemed to become less guarded and viewed the other side as individuals rather than the stereotypes often depicted in the media. In other words, a certain level of tolerance appeared to develop as a result of the civil discussion that occurred between these two distinctly different cultures.

This is not to say, however, that simply creating a forum for student interaction will automatically lead to cultural understanding. The other lessons that can be garnered from this study deal with how best to use technology to create these opportunities for transcultural exchange. The synchronous communication afforded by Skype™ allowed the students to reach a level of substantive discourse in a way that was faster, if not more effective, than commonly used asynchronous communication, such as email or threaded discussion boards. As evidence of this assertion, the first hour of this conference was taken up with the Moroccan students giving formal speeches, which resulted in similarly monologic, formal exchanges from the American side. With asynchronous communication, participants have considerable time to gather their thoughts and compose polished responses to prompts that, while thoughtful, often lack a conversational tone and can seem somewhat impersonal, particularly without any prior face-to-face interaction.<sup>30</sup> This type of conversation is fairly common among individuals who have just met, particularly among those from different cultures. Yet the ability to talk in real time and see each other appeared to hasten this process considerably, which is essential for the time and cost constraints that may hamper transcultural communication.

Even with the face-to-face interaction, the moderators went to great lengths to advance the dialogue during the videoconference. Having the assigned readings given to both student groups was essential in "breaking the ice" and starting the discussion on common ground. Although the discussion soon diverted from the readings and onto topics of interest to the students, the readings, from both American and Moroccan authors, allowed for a starting point that was non-confrontational. Had the conference started with accusations of stereotyping and media bias rather than the comparatively benign topic of development, the tone of the conference could have turned considerably negative, which, in turn, could have precluded a true discussion from taking place. In addition, the moderators played an essential role in helping facilitate the conference by ensuring that students maintained collegiality and asked questions that would further the discussion. This finding supports research done on asynchronous communication that describes instructor presence as essential to facilitating academic dialogue in a distance education environment.<sup>31</sup> Having a moderator who was familiar with both American and Moroccan culture also probably had an impact on the continuity of the discussion, although it is difficult to make definitive assertions based on this one exchange.

### Implications

The question remains, as Christine Sleeter and Sharon Tettegah have raised, if the positive effects of this experience might be applicable to other educational contexts.<sup>32</sup> Incorporating global instruction and cultural diversity into classroom instruction has been a long-standing imperative for social studies educators, as evidenced by the explicit inclusion of these instructional objectives into the curriculum standards advocated by the National Council for the Social Studies.<sup>33</sup> Yet many pre-service and practicing teachers, even those committed to diversity and cosmopolitanism, have difficulty implementing this type of focus in their classrooms, often due to a lack of resources or culturally homogeneous schools and communities. Based upon this study, it appears that videoconferencing offers a way for teachers to diversify their classrooms electronically.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps the most obvious implication of this experience is the relative ease by which moderators were able to get two diverse groups of students together. Skype™ is a free technology that can be downloaded from the Internet, and the other materials used are either regu-

larly found at any university or K-12 classroom or can be purchased for under fifty dollars.<sup>35</sup> Although few teachers may have the contacts to arrange a meeting between their students and students from another nation, the notion of transcultural education could be taken broadly to include live conferences between social studies students in different parts of the United States. For example, consider the positive implications of having students in urban northern settings discuss historical and cultural events with students from rural southwestern schools, or having students in traditionally "red" states discuss politics with students in traditionally "blue" states and discovering that they are not nearly as polarized as American media would have them believe.

Even on a smaller scale, social studies educators could use videoconferencing as a way to connect or team-teach with other educators within their own district or school. Oftentimes, schools located a mere miles from each other cater to strikingly different cultural populations, and, sadly, the different social contexts in which these students live often preclude them from interacting outside of school. Videoconferencing provides a unique way for students to experience the cultural diversity that exists in their own local communities, which, in turn, can lead to conversations that link local and global spheres. In short, the possibilities afforded by videoconferencing are endless, and it seems clear that advancements in technology continue to ensure that ambitious social studies teaching does not have to be restricted by geographic or space limitations.

### Conclusion

The overall success of a single two-hour conference between American and Moroccan undergraduate students provides clear evidence that such conferences are highly feasible and can provide a context for transcultural, transnational dialogue that can enrich the personal and professional development of all participants. Nearly two years after the videoconference, its memory, and perhaps its effect, remains to be understood. Several of the American and Moroccan students still speak of the experience as one of the highlights of their university careers. It is hoped that this study serves as a model from which future research on technology-mediated transcultural dialogue can develop and further contribute to the growing wave of global education in the United States.

## Notes

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3. David Hicks, "Thirty Years of Global Education: A Reminder of Key Principles and Precedents," *Educational Review* 55 (2003): 265-75.
4. James A. Banks, "Citizenship Education for a Pluralistic Democratic Society," *The Social Studies* 81 (1990): 210-14; Banks, "Diversity, Group Identity, and Citizenship Education in a Global Age," *Educational Researcher* 37 (2008): 129-39; James W. Loewen, *Teaching What Really Happened: How to Avoid the Tyranny of Textbooks and Get Students Excited About Doing History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010).
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6. Nussbaum, "Patriotism or Cosmopolitanism?"
7. Katharyne Mitchell and Walter C. Parker, "I Pledge Allegiance To . . . Flexible Citizenship and Shifting Scales of Belonging," *Teachers College Record* 110 (2008): 775-804; Hillary Putnam, "Must We Choose Between Patriotism and Universal Reason?" in *For Love of Country?* ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon, 2002), 91-97.
8. Audrey Osler and Hugh Starkey, "Learning for Cosmopolitan Citizenship: Theoretical Debates and Young People's Experiences," *Educational Review* 55 (2003): 252.
9. Fazal Rizvi, "Debating Globalism and Education After September 11th," *Comparative Education* 40 (2004): 157-71.
10. Elizabeth B. Moje, "A Call for New Research on New and Multi-Literacies," *Research in the Teaching of English* 43 (2009): 348-62.
11. For a description of multiple literacies, refer to Colin Lankshear and Michelle Knobel, *New Literacies: Everyday Practices and*

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12. John P. Myers, "Rethinking the Social Studies Curriculum in the Context of Globalization: Education for Global Citizenship in the U.S.," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 34 (2006): 370-94.

13. For an introduction to cosmopolitan educational thought in Canada and Europe, refer to Will Kymlicka, "Multicultural States and Intercultural Citizens," *Theory and Research in Education*, 1 (2003): 147-69. For studies specifically related to Europe, refer to Osler and Starkey, "Learning for Cosmopolitan Citizenship" and Hugh Starkey, "Citizenship Education in France and Britain: Evolving Theories and Practices," *The Curriculum Journal* 11 (2000): 39-54.

14. James A. Banks, "Teaching for Social Justice, Diversity, and Citizenship in a Global World," *Educational Forum* 68 (2004): 296-305.

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16. Amy Gutmann, "Unity and Diversity in Democratic Multicultural Education: Creative and Destructive Tensions," in *Diversity and Citizenship Education: Global Perspectives*, ed. James A. Banks (New York: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 71-96; Graham Pike and David Selby, *Global Teacher, Global Learner* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988).

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23. Merryfield, "Why Aren't Teachers Being Prepared".

24. The two works were read by both groups of students. The first work, Leila Abouzeid, *The Director and Other Stories from Morocco* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2006), is a collection of short, fictional stories about individuals finding their identity within a recently independent Moroccan nation. The second work, Malcolm X and Alex

Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X, as Told to Alex Haley* (New York: Ballentine, 1973), chronicles the life of the civil rights leader, including his conversion to Islam and his much publicized break from the Nation of Islam after making a pilgrimage to Mecca.

25. Detailed protocols for ethnographic and qualitative research can be found in Philip F. Carspecken, *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* (New York: Routledge, 1996) and Martyn Hammersly and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (London: Routledge, 1995), while a standard protocol for discourse analysis can be found in James P. Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

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27. Pseudonym.

28. Merryfield, "Why Aren't Teachers Being Prepared"; Merryfield, "Pedagogy for Global Perspectives in Education".

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33 <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands>

34 Wayne Journell and Mark Dressman, "Using Videoconferences to Diversify Classrooms Electronically," *The Clearing House* 84, (2011): 109-13.

35 The Skype™ software can be downloaded for free at <http://www.skype.com>